

Expanding the franchise, should we lower the voting age to 16?

TASK

1. Read the information below and the additional articles,
2. Then summarise what you think are the three strongest arguments to **lower the voting age to 16** (put examples to support your points in red/green),
3. State why you find it convincing,
4. Then add a counter argument or a limitation for each of the argument.

Once you have completed this, do the same for the three strongest arguments to **keep the voting age at 18**, then add a counter argument or a limitation for each of the arguments.

Make sure you bring this work with you to your first politics lesson.

[Tip: you are not expected to understand all the issues or terminology in your research but it would be helpful if you made of list of terms you do not understand and bring them to class]

Elections & Voting Explained

(Taken from <http://www.britpolitics.co.uk/uk-elections-16-vote-democracy>)

Should the voting age be lowered to 16?

The voting age was reduced from 21 to 18 in 1969. Recently there has been a discussion as to whether it should be reduced to 16 and the Labour and Liberal Democrat parties are both committed to the change. Opinion polls, at present, show that younger voters are less likely to support the Conservatives. This has been given extra impetus by the Scottish Independence Referendum. Cameron and Salmond agreed that 16 and 17 year olds would be able to vote in the Referendum and the SNP leader expected them to be more pro-independence. Young people were active in the debates and campaigns.

Arguments for

Votes at 16 would be consistent with other areas of responsibility. 16 year olds can make educational choices, join the armed forces and consent to medical treatment.

There is a need to reduce the political alienation of young people who are likely to be as aware of issues at 16 as they would be at 18 and might feel that their views do not matter if they cannot vote. A wide range of political decisions affect them such as tax rates, job seekers' allowance, university fees, bullying and public transport. Politicians would be more likely to act on these if young people could vote.

Young people may well have better knowledge of issues than some older people as they are more likely to follow them on the internet and Citizenship Education, which includes electoral systems and how government works, is taught as part of the National Curriculum.

It is important to increase turnout at elections. In the 1964 general election the youngest age group turned out to vote as strongly as other age groups but this has changed. 44% of 18 to 24 year olds voted in the 2010 general election compared with 76% of the over 65s. Voting at 16 when politics is still discussed at school/college may get them into the habit of voting.

Arguments against

People legally become adults at 18. Many of the things that 16 year olds can do are still circumscribed, for example, they can join the armed forces but not in frontline service and only with the permission of their parents.

At 16 people may not have the maturity and life experience to make political judgements. They may still be under the influence of parents and teachers or college lecturers. They may also be easily influenced by popular trends as Cleggmania, which developed after the leaders' debates in the 2010 general election campaign, showed, when support for Clegg soared through the social media because of the way that he spoke on camera in the first debate.

The majority of voters in opinion polls, including half of those in the 16-18 year old group, felt that the voting age should stay at 18. Most other countries have chosen 18.

Optional additional reading:

1. *General election 2017: Theresa May rules out votes at 16*, The BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/election-2017-39915483>)
2. *The Daily Mail Comment from 2023 on 16 year olds voting. Only the first half is relevant* ([DAILY MAIL COMMENT: Labour's sinister plot to rig our elections | Daily Mail Online](#))
3. *Lowering voting age boosts long-term participation in elections* University of Sheffield ([Lowering voting age boosts long-term participation in elections | News | The University of Sheffield](#))
4. *Labour considers plans to let EU nationals and 16-year-olds vote*, the Guardian ([Labour considers plans to let EU nationals and 16-year-olds vote | Labour | The Guardian](#))

| Three strongest arguments in favour of lowering the voting age to 16 | Counter arguments or limitations to this point. |
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| <p>Summary of argument:</p> <p>Why do you find it convincing?</p> | |
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